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I. SUMMARY

Although King Abdullah has made political reform one of the cornerstones of his reign, developments over the course of the past year suggest greater attention has been paid to bureaucratic efficiency and public sector reform. It was not until early April, when the government of Prime Minister Faisal Al-Fayez resigned and a new Prime Minister and government were sworn in – marking the fifth government in Jordan since Abdullah assumed the throne in 1999 – that the King took steps to more publicly advance his political reform program.

The King, apparently displeased with the previous government over the slow pace of reform – particularly with regard to the awkward political party, professional association, and election laws – tasked academic Adnan Badran with forming a new cabinet. The poor handling of two international crises: the diplomatic row with Iraq over a Jordanian citizen's alleged involvement in a suicide bombing in Hillah, Iraq, that killed 125 people, and the rejection at March's Arab League summit in Algiers of a Jordanian proposal for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict, also likely contributed to the reshuffle.

The King is pinning his hopes for progress in the political realm on a 10-year reform plan – a “national agenda” – which is being developed by a Royal Commission of experts and former government officials. The agenda is planned for release in September. The Commission is chaired by former Foreign Minister and current Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesperson Marwan Muasher.

While the King is under enormous pressure to balance political tensions that spill over from Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian issue, progress on the Jordanian front would send an important message to its neighbors. To that end, IRI efforts to strengthen citizen interest and participation in the political process – and to cultivate reform-minded leadership at all levels – are imperative.

In the third quarter of the program, upon concluding the logistical set-up of a permanent presence in Amman in the previous quarter, IRI focused on further developing its municipal-level relationships and implementing programmatic activities.

II. BACKGROUND

With its unique geopolitical position between the Iraq theatre and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its strategic importance as a key U.S. ally with respect to inter-regional relations, Jordan has long been considered a linchpin for stability in the Middle East.

When King Abdullah II ascended to the throne in 1999, he boldly set forth an agenda for political reform and has committed himself to ushering in a new era of broader political participation. Movement towards political reform culminated in the creation of a new portfolio in 2003, the Ministry for Political Development, whose mission is to implement King Abdullah's comprehensive program for political development. While the ministry was initially expected to issue a new political parties law conducive to greater political competition in the course of the year, it was not until March 2005 that the Ministry introduced amendments to the existing political party law of 1992. The political parties law amendments, which entitle parties financial allocations from the state budget and increase the required number of founding members for legal registration from 50 to 200, along with municipality law amendments allowing for fully-elected councils and elected mayors, seem to indicate a quickening of the pace of reform within the Kingdom. To that end, in early April 2005, the government of then-Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez resigned and King Abdullah tasked academic Adnan Badran with forming a new, more reform-minded cabinet. As in the previous government, four women are in the newest cabinet.

Since being named in early April, however, Prime Minister Badran's cabinet of relatively young, highly educated technocrats, has come under unprecedented attack. Following a three-month impasse with a group of 53 MPs in the 110-member Lower House of Parliament, Badran was forced to name eight new ministers in a major Cabinet reshuffle aimed at winning a parliamentary vote of confidence and gaining a mandate for reform and slashing oil subsidies. The MPs, who hail mainly from the country's southern, more tribal region, complain that the Lower House was not consulted in the naming of new ministers and that the south was not represented in the new government lineup. They additionally criticized Badran for reinstating ministers the MPs accused of corruption and being out of touch with the economic problems of ordinary Jordanians.

Though drafted during the previous al-Fayez government, Badran has also met resistance regarding the political parties law. One month after the draft law was distributed for review, the country's 15 political parties (many of which are small and unrepresentative) rejected it, deeming it a "setback to democracy and an assault on pluralism" given that it prohibits the use of religious establishments, civic associations, professional associations, and sports clubs from being used for political party activities and bars any activity that could harm Jordan's relationships with other countries.

Also causing significant political tension in the Kingdom at present is the conflict between the government and the IAF over professional associations, which stems from

the government's decision to ban professional associations from engaging in political activities after the IAF and professional associations organized demonstrations calling for a boycott of U.S.-made goods, protesting Jordan's 1994 treaty with Israel. In early March, the tension rose further with the previous government's introduction of a law governing the professional associations that would change the way its executive councils are elected. According to the opposition, the new system would increase the power of tribal representatives on the association's governing bodies and dilute the influence of the professional associations' largely urban (i.e. Palestinian origin) membership of 140,000. In an unprecedented action, IAF and professional association members launched sit-in demonstrations at association branches throughout the country and took out full-page ads in the three biggest dailies criticizing the new law and asking that the Lower House of Parliament reject it. After heated debate in the Jordanian parliament, the bill was sent to the chamber's legal committee for review, where it remains today. In response to opposition to both the political party and professional association laws, the Badran government has said it will produce new, "more democratic" versions of each.

Despite efforts by the Palace, reforms continue to be introduced by top-down, authoritarian measures and Jordanians face a political environment with a weak parliament and limited political party activity. Further complicating the situation is the composition of a Jordanian population that is 50%-70% Palestinian, causing issues of identity to factor strongly into national politics and constraining the opportunity for open and honest political debate. In order to preserve the delicate balance of power between the Palestinians and Transjordanians, no Palestinian-based political parties have been established, and instead Palestinians have opted to join with the Islamists or opposition groups as the only means for political engagement.

For his part, King Abdullah must balance his desire to push political reform with the need to preserve the status quo for his traditional base of power among the East Bank elite. If the cause of reform is pushed too aggressively, King Abdullah risks alienating power-brokers in the Transjordanian community, which fears the full enfranchisement of Palestinian rights.

Notwithstanding these challenges, IRI strongly believes that opportunities to broaden the democratic debate in Jordan exist, and that well-reasoned initiatives to increase citizen participation, promote good governance, and support multiparty competition can be introduced.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

During the quarter, IRI-Jordan staff have continued to develop relationships with mayors, governors, and municipal councilors in the municipalities of Salt, Karak, and Tafileh. IRI has targeted each of these communities for assistance to improve two-way communication between local government and citizens. This municipal-level approach to combat public apathy in government and build confidence in elected and appointed officials forms the core of IRI's work in Jordan. IRI-Jordan also provided a subgrant to the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center (PBYRC) to conduct a youth empowerment program in the communities of Mafrak, Karak, and Tafileh. In order to support initiatives

with civic organizations and local government, IRI is partnering with the Jordan Center for Social Research (JCSR) and Middle East Marketing & Research Consultants (MEMRC) to conduct a series of three national and two municipal-level public opinion polls between July 2005 and January 2006.

Mayors

IRI is working at the municipal level in Jordan to build bridges between government and citizens by establishing a framework for cooperation and joint projects between municipal government and community associations that encourage citizen participation in setting priorities for local councils. In late May, IRI conducted an intensive training program in the municipalities of Salt, Karak, and Tafileh for mayors and their staffs, elected municipal councilors, public information officers, department directors, and other municipal officials. Goran Jesic, Mayor of Indjija municipality in Serbia, and Jelena Bojovic, IRI-Serbia program consultant and municipal trainer conducted two-day seminars in each city which focused on improving the citizen outreach capacity of municipal officials and increasing their ability to work with citizens in solving local problems. The training included practical exercises in developing internal and external communications strategies, with Mayor Jesic presenting his successful experiences improving services for citizens in Serbia (implemented with IRI assistance), including the establishment of a one-stop customer service center and the “System 48” response mechanism, which requires Indjija municipal employees to respond to citizens’ complaints within 48 hours. The trainings also covered the following issues: Standards in Local Government, Public Consultation, Customer Care, Staff Development, and Improving Public Information Management. The program included direct consultations with the mayors and municipal councilors on ways to improve their communication with the public and increase the transparency of their municipalities.

A total of four mayors, eight elected municipal councilors, and 62 municipal officials attended the seminars. Women participants included the country’s only woman mayor, Ranah Hijaya, two municipal councilors, and 22 municipal officials. The training received positive press coverage, with five articles published in the three main national dailies and two in *Petra*, the official Jordan News Agency.

Since receiving the communication training, Salt municipal employees have begun to implement portions of the “System 48” model presented to them in May. As follow-up, the Mayor of Salt has requested further IRI assistance in organizing a training program on strategic planning which will focus on ways to incorporate citizen’s input into municipal planning using survey and focus group data. In response to requests from the Mayors of Salt and Tafileh to facilitate direct information exchange between municipalities in Jordan, particularly between regions that do not normally interact with one another, IRI-Jordan also plans to co-organize with the Mayor of Salt periodic meetings of reform-minded mayors to discuss issues of common concern. There have been several attempts in the past to establish an Association of Mayors in Jordan, but all have been thwarted by the central government. Such gatherings could form the nucleus of a future Mayor’s Association.

Women

In cooperation with Jordan's only woman mayor, Ranah Hijayah, of Al-Hisa municipality in the Tafileh governorate, IRI is assisting a new initiative, dubbed "Tafileh Women Pioneers." The goal of the group is to organize women leaders from the Tafileh governorate and provide a forum in which participants may share their experiences as "pioneers" in women's leadership and strategize on ways to encourage other women in the governorate to become more involved in community affairs.

To date, IRI has helped organize two Women Pioneers meetings: an inaugural meeting in the previous quarter during which the Pioneers discussed the objectives of the network and developed program ideas; and a larger meeting in May with the mayor and governor of Tafileh where the women presented projects they had developed for increasing women's participation in the decision-making process in the governorate. At the May meeting, the governor and mayor agreed to the women's proposal for a town hall meeting to be organized jointly by the Pioneers and IRI to encourage municipal and governorate department directors to incorporate women's concerns in their work and to consider qualified women for leading positions in local government. The town hall meeting is currently scheduled for mid-July. The Tafileh Women Pioneers have also requested IRI assistance in producing a monthly newsletter focusing on the success stories of women leaders in the governorate. The newsletter would serve as a forum for women to advocate for increased participation in local affairs.

The conduct of such programs will assist IRI-Jordan in identifying women leaders at the municipal level who may run for elected office based on the experience they gain and the contacts they make conducting advocacy campaigns and working directly with local government. With municipal elections now potentially taking place early next year, immediate attention to identifying and assisting viable women leaders is essential.

Youth

IRI is providing a sub-grant to the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center (PBYRC) to conduct a youth empowerment program designed to equip young activists with the tools and training necessary to initiate advocacy efforts in their respective communities. In mid-June, PBYRC launched the program, which targets active youth committees in the communities of Karak, Mafraq, and Tafileh, with orientation sessions for youth activists in each of the three cities. The one-day orientation workshops introduced approximately 60 participants to the project, assessed community needs and priorities, and reiterated the importance of youth participation in community service. Following the workshops, PBYRC identified a core advocacy group of 10 youth from each area who will lead the second phase of the program. The second phase will begin in early July and will consist of a series of six four-day workshops that will provide advanced capacity-building training resulting in the development of approximately three advocacy campaigns per community.

Polling

In order to support IRI initiatives with civic organizations and local government, IRI and two partner organizations will conduct polling at the national and municipal level to provide decision makers and the general public with an accurate picture of public opinion concerning political reform, democratization, and the performance of government and elected officials. IRI has entered into a contract with the Jordan Center for Social Research (JCSR) and Middle East Marketing & Research Consultants (MEMRC) to conduct a series of three national and two municipal-level public opinion polls between July 2005 and January 2006. The three national polls will examine Jordanian public opinion on issues related to political reform, economic development, governance, legislative affairs, political parties, political affiliation, general attitudes towards democracy, and related issues. The municipal polls will be conducted in three cities (representing northern, central, and southern Jordan) in two waves and will focus on citizens' attitudes towards issues related to local governance, including municipal services, corruption, decentralization, municipal and regional elections, and the role of women and youth in local governance. Work has begun on the questionnaire for the first national poll.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objective: To encourage more representative and competitive multiparty political systems.

Result 1: Established political parties and organizations will be reformed and nascent democratic political parties and organizations will be strengthened to make them more democratic, transparent, representative and effective.

No results to date.

Result 2: Democratic political participation will be expanded and competitive multiparty systems will be encouraged.

Upon receipt of a sub-grant from IRI, the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center (PBYRC) launched a new youth empowerment program designed to equip young activists from Karak, Mafrqa, and Tafleh with the tools and training necessary to initiate advocacy efforts in their respective communities.

IRI entered into a contract with the Jordan Center for Social Research (JCSR) and Middle East Marketing & Research Consultants (MEMRC) to conduct a series of three national and two municipal-level public opinion polls between August 2005 and January 2006, the results of which will provide decision makers and the general public with an accurate picture of public opinion concerning political reform, democratization, and the performance of government and elected officials.

IRI staff assisted the country's only female mayor, Ranah Hijayah, of Al-Hisa municipality in the Tafileh governorate, in organizing and co-sponsoring a May meeting designed to bring together the expanding network of Tafileh Women Pioneers with the governor and mayor to discuss projects developed by the women to increase their role in the political life of the governorate.

Result 3: Governance skills of political leaders and representatives in national and local level elected bodies will be increased through training and strengthening of parliamentary blocs or caucuses.

IRI, with the assistance of Goran Jesic, Mayor of Indjija municipality in Serbia, and an IRI-Serbia program consultant, conducted an intensive training program in the municipalities of Salt, Karak, and Tafileh for mayors and their staffs, elected municipal councilors, public information officers, department directors, and other municipal officials which focused on improving the citizen outreach capacity of municipal officials and increasing their ability to work with citizens in solving local problems.

IRI staff held consultations with the Mayors of Salt and Tafileh regarding facilitating direct information exchanges between municipalities in Jordan whereby mayors may discuss issues of common concern and identify priority areas for reform.

V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

With well-established municipal relationships and newly-signed agreements with the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center (PBYRC) and the Jordan Center for Social Research (JCSR) and Middle East Marketing & Research Consultants (MEMRC) in place, IRI will be able to continue in the next quarter the expansion of programmatic activities.

In early July, IRI will co-host with the Mayor of Salt a meeting bringing together the mayors of 10 large municipalities in Jordan – Irbid, Jerash, Ajloun, Zarqa, Mafraq, Salt, Madaba, Karak, Tafileh and Ma'an. The meeting will provide an opportunity for mayors to discuss directly issues of common concern as well as identify priority areas for reform. In addition, IRI anticipates conducting follow-on training for Salt municipal officials that focuses on ways in which to incorporate citizen's input into municipal planning using survey and focus group data.

Also in early July, PBYRC will begin the second phase of the youth advocacy program, which will consist of a series of six four-day workshops designed to provide advanced capacity-building training resulting in the development of approximately three advocacy campaigns per target community.

Lastly, IRI will continue its consultations with the Jordan Center for Social Research (JCSR) and Middle East Marketing & Research Consultants (MEMRC) regarding conduct of the first national poll in the upcoming quarter.